Tape NO. 6

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NARRATOR Allie Chamberlin

INTERVIEWER phyllis Lotz

PLACE Los Potraros Ranch
Los Olivos

DATE March 16, 1979

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Interview with Helen Elizabeth Chamberlin, Interview 1
Date of Interview: 16, March 1979; Rancho Los Potrero, Los Olivos
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

Mrs. C. I think we will just start with the emigrant, perhaps on my father's side. James(Jacovas) De Fremery was born in 1826 and died in 1899, was a lawyer and came to the United States in 1848. During all the commotion in California he came across the Isthmus by mule back in 1849 and settled out here. In 1853 he married Verdeline Teresa , she was born in Munster, Holland, her father was a Burgermeister there, and also had an import business in New York. I have by the way, portraits of both of them. Jachvas changed his name to James which is the English form, when he came to live here, the name was too much for other Americans. The de Fremery is a French name, came from a Huguenot family who fled to Holland. James started the Savings Union Bank of San Francisco, the first bank out here and was its president for many years. He was also Consul of Hollard and the Duchy of Luxenburg. He served them for some 30 years. He was very much loved as Consul and took no pay. The Savings Union Bank was bought in time by the American Trust Company and now is part of Wells Fargo.

Great grandfather James also wrote up the Consular History in Dutch, also an essay on California Mortgages which is still widely used today. He wrote other books too, and he seemed to have been much of a leader in early San Francisco days. His brother, William, whom I remember as a very small child, hearing his old, old man, after all he was my Great,great Uncle, tell the stories of the Vigilantes of San Francisco and how he used to ram the powder doen into his old gun, that he used.

My Grandmother was born in San Francisco in a little

bungalow on what is now Nob Hill. One day when I was driving with Uncle Ernst, he pointed out the Mark Hopkins and said, "Well, that bungalow was about where the kitchen of the hotel is now. Later Grandfather built a home, it still stands on Adeline Street in Oakland, which was named after my Grandmother.

My Father was born there and brought up there with his brothers and sisters, and the beautiful grounds were filled with trees, I can bearly remember them as a child. They have been removed to make a playground for children. I used to play there too.

I see that I have my father born, but not my Grandfather My Grandfather was Peter Eustes Van LobenSels and he was born in Hollard in 1851 and died in Oakland in 1927. He graduated in law from . He came to Calfornia, fell in love with the daughter of the Dutch Consul and they were married in 1878. In due course he practiced law and he became the Dutch Consul after my Great grandfather retired, and served 30 years without pay. Now being a lawyer he was sent by his father-in-law up into the Sacramento Valley area to look over some flat land that was costing the bank a lot of money. My Grandfather wanted to know if this was a worth while investment. Grandfather Peter, out of Hollard, had a brother who was an engineer who had helped build the dykes in Hollard. He knew quite alot about them. So he went up there and after looking it over he came back with a report that never they way that things were going, would it work out. After all the many attempts to build levves and holders were made to make it safe for farming. Most of these had failed. GrandIsland was the only exception there. After many conseltations my Great grandfather and the bank asked my Grandfather to undertake working out the proper way to drain this land. So he did in 1881, he began this tremendious process and I've heard my Father tell this story so often of how he began with 100 Chinese coolies that had come off the railroad, each coolie had a wheelbarrow

and they worked and worked building up the levees. When the levee was built up on one part, another part would sink. So it took alot of work and time and before long they brought in a big reclamation dredger. I can remember those dredgers working and consequently it was not too long before that our land was the best and highest of any in the country and were used as models for all other levees.

I should backtrack a minute. My father having been born in this country but from a very Dutch family was educated more or less in Switzerland and then went to highschool in Oakland and a year at Berkeley but he was very much interested in what was going on in farming regions where the levees had all been worked out. Then he went to Cornell, for the Agricultural course there. So Father met Mother who in the mean time had gone to Cornell because her brother had wasted all his father's money on gambling debts. It took Mother a long time to forgive him for that. Because she was not able to go to boarding school and the schools around her were not too good. She did go to Horace Mann and then decided to go to Cornell, and learn to work the family farm in Connecticut. She was the only woman in that part of the University and used to have alot of fun, and used to say that when her forestry group were out planting trees it was so hot and her back hurt so much she would look at the boys in the class and ask," How would you like a nice glass of ice lemonade." And of course they were delighted and took on her work and she brought them lemonade. When she discussed the merits of a bull in a cattle judging class, she had her ideas and a young classmate had his. Thats how Father and Mother met. They had alot of fun courting at Cornell. Mother ideas were free and easy, but she was a very proper girl and after all she was a My Father born in this country had Dutch ideas on how ladies should behave. They would not go off and picnic together unchaperoned, but Mother persuaded him it was

alright. In due course they were married. Mother came west, found the ranch utterly impossible in those days. The mud was two feet think in the winter time and the dust the same in summer. Terrible. She lived with a Dutch family which was not very easy. Then I came along, I was the first one. She had nine children 7 which grew up. Well, I was a little overdue and my father and one of his brothers were out hunting in the Berkeley Hills at that time, all woods. When he tried crossing over a creek, he never seemed to get across, the oak trees were swaying, bowing and bowing and though he was a California boy he did not understand. Fortunately neither of the horses had broken loose. They got home as as the rode through Oakland they realized what had happened, all the chimney pieces were in the middle of the streets. He hurried home to find that the dear little Irish nurse who had brought up my Mother ~~up~~ back east and had come out to help, had been leaning over Mother and a bookcase had fallen on her a and had broken her arm. So Mother was quite busy with Bridget, and then I came along. 1906, April 19th. The earthquake was on the 18th. I was an earthquake baby and just to fill things in my first words were in Dutch and this began to disturb my very New England Mother. She found the Dutch family difficult anyway. And they found her ways difficult too. Their eatting for instance. At the table my Grandmother would say,"My dear, don't you thing you could change your table manners?" Mother said no, I eat in the American fashion. I keep my fork in my right hand! When she found I was speaking Dutch, it was too much for her so she said it was time we went up to live on the ranch. So they did and she put up with the horrible flies, the mud, the dust and the Father was terribly ill and had to go to hospital. My Grandfather, Peter, who had drained the land in the first place, was in Holland on a vist, and the high water came. The levees had been pretty well brought along by this time but the man who was in charge because Father

was not there and Grandfather was away, had been very careless and put mud on tops of the hard, hard old levee. So when the high water came you could hear the bang when the back levee broke. Father came hurrying in and said,"Helen, we have to leave" but she said she was too busy. He had the horses bridled and the buggy ready so off she went and just in time the levee is not the safest place because the bridges were out. Later my Father sent Uncle Ernst to make sure that the horses in the lower pasture were turned out so they would have a chance to swim to safety. My uncle was not to practical and he rode as quickly as he could to the pasture and did not see any horses, so rode back and thought nothing of it. The horses were down in the cottonwoods and when the water came in the fences rose and the horses became tangled in barbed wire. And it was Father and Mother who had to go out later and shoot them as there was no way to save them. Mother was particularily sad because her little saddle mare had to go too, her first really western horse. Mother was a rider from the beginning in Connecticut where her farm was which my grandfather on that side had started but she had never ridden Western style before coming to California. My Mother's name was Helen Adel aide Elbrick born in Yonkers, New York in 1881 and died out here in 1974 in this house. Her parents were old New England stock many of them passaged on the Mayflower. And by the way, my husband Ted also had some Mayflower stock. So my children can cound ten of the twenty three families of the Mayflower Society are their forebearers. It is father exciting.

My father's name was Morris Carl Constantine Van Lobensels. When I was christened in the Congregational Church in Oakland by Dr. Brown who was later head of Religious Department at Yale, my name was to be Helen Adelaide Elizabeth,HAE, all the time I grew up. Later when I went away to school I was known as Elizabeth.

After all I'm grateful to Father because Elizabeth Van Lobensels at least has a rhythm where Helen Adelaide Van Löbensels.....just imagine!

We had a flood in 1907, in 1908 there was a fire and the whole house burned down. I remember my Mother shaking me before dawn and saying, "Follow me, dear" and snatching up my baby sister, grabing a rug, but it was the only thing from her wedding gifts a small ori ental rug, that I have upstairs. I can remember going down those stairs and seeing the tremendous fire. We all had our nighties on, we trapsted over the fields to our foreman's house and were given warm milk to drink, there is something about warm milk and my family.

I remember riding on the Ferryboat between San Francisco and Oakland, a drive on ferry, and my Father always ordered warm milk.

To come back to the ranch, that was a tremendous ranch and now my brother and his son run part of it. I was always grateful that I grew up there. Even though it was far away from people, we were taught at home, for instance, the Calvert School System, Mother taught me. And then the babies came along so we had governesses to teach. We had one Dutch governess and then French. I can speak French. When my Grandmother visited us the American Grandmother, her husband was president of the Century Publishing Company, we were flooded with books. We read a great deal and Grandmother would read aloud ut us. Then Mother decided we would go off to school. I went to Castalaya for two years, my most difficult tow years that I can remember. Its a girls school in Palo Alto and still functions. From there I went to Stanford and I loved those four years. Then I took a years to get my Masters at Cornell. Not only because Mother and Father had gone there and loved it, but because it had a good department in Biology. This had been my major at Stanford. So a year at Cormell was terrific, no tow days alike! A most marvelous exper-

ience. It had a beautiful campus with those great gorges in it, trees of all different kinds and interesting people. I won the walking contest for women, 50 miles, I managed. Nobody could believe it. I received a cup for that.

After leaving Cornell, it was hard to get teaching jobs in 1930, so I was asked to come and tutor a girl in Hawaii. This little girl had been in my tent when I was a councelor for two summers at a little camp called Chamusa, Lake Tahoe. Her parents wanted to take her home so I took the job, a year on Maui. In those days a plantation was fabulous. I still know some of those people. After that year, I could have stayed, but my Father kept saying, come home. I would have liked to have stayed.

I taught in Kindergarten in Sacramento until there was an opening down here in the Santa Ynez Valley Highschool. So in 1933 I came here and had two marvelous years teaching and really loved it. I met Ted who was Clerk of the Board of Trustees at that time, and rode with him several times on the ranch. And then we were married.

PL: What courses did you teach?

Mrs. C. Biology, Girls Phys. Ed.and the office too, I did two peoples jobs. I got $100 a month.

PL: How many children in the school?

Mrs. C. There were less than 100, so you knew them all.

PL: Where did you live at that time?

Mrs. C. First, on top of the hill just above the old highschool site, there were three houses in a row, with the Mead Family, where the Westcots lived. The second year I lived with the Hourahan Family, just off the Indian Reservation. They were marvelous. I often went to the Mission with them to church service. I was immediately roped in by the minister of the Presbyterian Church, Mr. Wilhoit, as a Sunday School teacher, and interestingly enough there were four Lewis girls and I got to know them as they grew up. One is Mrs. George Salsbury, another is Mrs. Joe Alegrea, and Mrs. Troup.

I see Martha Salsbury ofter. I felt I really beonged.

We had seven children, Ted and I. The first left us when she was 22 months old, just after the second was born. This was a difficult thing to take. I learned to pray, then, really for the first time. This helped the baby some and me, a great deal, Ted also. The children's names are Helen, Fred, William, Debbie, then Mike, Morris Carl Chanberlin, named after my Father. He became sick and died of cancer too. When I found he had cancer I could not believe it. I did not know how I would live through it. He had a series of x-rays and I felt I could leave him and I went to a camp where they helped me with this ordeal, a retreat. I came out of there ready to help Mike. He was just seven, and had just learned to read. I was pleased about that. I believe when you go out, it is exactly the way you leave here. There is an Irish-Welch streak in my Mother's family, they are not really mediums, but they often are conscious of the next world. I have just enough that I am conscious of our first child, Ann sometimes and I am conscious of Mike, and I'm glad its there because I have several time been conscious ot Ted, knowing that heaven is there and that they are busy and so on but still with us keeping an eye on us, giving encouragement from time to time. There is a tremendiously encouraging loving thing. It gives you a completely different idea of death and after all.....

PL: Could we talk a little about your courtship before you and Mr. Chamberlin were married?

Mrs. C. Yes, of course and we haven't spoke about ted. He was born in 1902 in Concord. His Mother was born out here, she was one of the Bixbys. She had returned east to college and became very ill and the doctor who treated her fell in love with here and in due course they were married. She had eight children, all of them now living except for Ted. She started the Concord Academy for

for Girls in Concord,Mass. She was interested in all sorts of things. Ted did not like school and did not like the New England way of doing things, he always felt cramped.

End of first side, Tape 1.

Begin Side 2, Tape 1.

So when he was nineteen he came west, dispenced with college. His sisters and brothers all went to college. Ted worked for Fred Bixby, his cousin, who had a ranch at the Cojo and the Jalama. His ranches were up north and in the Long Beach area. Ted was a chore boy and was such a good one that it wasnt long before he was a regular ranch hand. He became foreman and in due course became Mr. Bixby's assistant for all the ranches. Then by this time, Ted wanted a ranch of his won. He looked around and finally heard of this place, but he also heard that it was not to be bought. Old Judge Canfield would not sell. Mr. Bixby said that the old judge was a friend and was very sick and he'd talk to the judge. Ted bought the land and it will be fifty years since Ted bought his property, 1929-1979. Ted bought 8,000 acres from Judge Canfield. Now this property lies in a horseshoe around the original homestead. There was two barn sites on this one and the original one was bought by H.H. Davis, who had bought it from Odin Buell just two years before. And before that Odin Buell bought the part on the other side of Hwy. 101 that all together had been a Mexican Land Grant, the Corral de Quate. We have the largest portion of the grant but not its name. Its name has to go with the central portion.

When I came, I noticed that Ted had no name to this ranch, and I could not believe it. On his letter paper he had Sand Springs, East Spring, Wheat Field, and Coranza Ranches. Ted wanted a new name but it was really Corral de Quate, and anytime we do anything say a new name it

must refer back to the original owner, Senora Maria Lataillade and this name has to be brought forth every time. I came forth with all kinds of names, even Grandmother's place in Connecticut, "Amistad" none of them suited Ted. Then I read a book written by his aunt who had come as a very small girl to Rancho Justo, up north near Hollister and she wrote of those early days and of Los Angeles and Long Beach. In that book I came across the remark of how surprised she was to go from the open fields to the enclosed potreros of Southern California Now, I have felt the same way having been brought up in the lower Sacramento area where you are free to ride horseback anywhere provided you close gates as you pass. Now down here you stay in your own area, don't move out unless you are invited. So this became the Rancho Los Potrero, from Aunt Sarah's Book.

Back to the highschool, after Ted was here he was put on the school board at Los Olivos, I can't imagine why! Except because he paid more taxes in Los Olivos that anyone else so it was well to have him on the board. Then he was put on the highschool board. And this is where I met him. Now I really loved teaching out here and tried to make things interesting for the girls and I can remember the first dance we had. The school was then on the old site just across where the Fire Station is in Santa Ynez, it was a delightful site just above the little town the Santa Cota Creek ran throught this. We did not have any space for dances and we went to the old gym that existed at that time which was at Los Olivos. So what we did in those days was to devide the gym in two and those that wanted to play games, and they were loud and noisy, were with Mr. Bensky, marvelous Mr. Bensky. And the people who wanted to dance were with Miss Van Löbensels. We had a very nice orchestra, all boys none of whom I knew but I was dancing with one wallflower and then another,and then with one of the boys. In those days it was quite alright to dance with another girl. Then I went downstairs to see how the food was coming along. The orch-

estra had left, they were probably downstairs too. They were at a little table, and they called, "Oh, Miss Van, come on over and join us," so I did, they were all smoking, I did not. But when I was in college if I were in a group that I did not know I would hold a cigarette, just to have something in my hand. So I did this and one of the girls that I know quite well now saw me, went dashing downstairs to see where I was and saw me with the cigarette, sitting there with those smoking boys! I never gave it another thought but I think I said,"You should not see me doing this." Anyway the following monday I was called into the office by Mr. Carner, Bert M. Carner, the principal,"I understand there was someone smoking at the dance,"he said. "There were only three woman teachers and I thought back, I don't think Mrs. Miller would do that or Mrs. Johnson, what do you mean?" He gave me a very hard look, "Oh, I said, do you mean me!" and he said, "Yes." I told him I was just holding a cigarette only for looks, and it was a silly thing to do. "This is very serious Miss Van Lobensels." "Next time we have an assembly I would like to tell exactly what happened." "Oh no," he said,"thats bemeaning for a teacher, no you can't explain, perhaps you can live it down, I'll bring it up at the trustees meeting and see what they say." I asked the principal if I was to leave, and he replied that he did not know. I was thoroughly scared. So that night I did work at night, getting the office work done. and paid the bills, etc. I heard the phone ring, and it was Ted Chamberlin one of the trustees and he said whats this story about smoking at the dance. I told him it seems to be very serious but it was blown all out of proportion and maybe I would have to leave, and I told him all about it. And that was part of our courting. I remember the first time he asked me to go to a movie, well I had already asked Louise Chrimes of Midland School to go with me to a movie in Santa Maria. So I told him that I had asked Louise to go and he gave me a funny look, because in the past if you got a date you left the first

person in the lerch and went on the date, but I did not like that. It was not fair. So Ted went with both Louise and me. At that time my Father had given me little open air Plymouth car, the joy of my life. We put the top down and off we went to Santa Maria. During the show Ted talked to Louise the whole time, did not talk to me at all. After, he said why don't we stop at the ranch and he'd make us some hot cocoa, we did. I made the cocoa, that was fun and not long after that, there was the State Fair in Sacramento and Ted was in charge of all the live stock. Mr. Bixby was one of the directors of the fair and he had put Ted in charge, and since I loved the fair, I asked about going, he gave me some passes. I asked a friend to go with me. We had a lot of fun and only 30 miles from my Father and Mother's home. We stayed at Amistad. Then not long after I thought Ted should meet my family. They were planning to see the building of Hoover Dam, Ted and I would join them at the dam site, we did. We were at the foot of the dam, my Father had to go out on the open platform, Tad passed inspection and we got engaged. Wedding took place at my Mother and Father's home and blossoms all over the living room. My sisters were bridesmaids, four brothers were ushers and it was a delightful wedding and I had said, we got a prayer book from Mr. Wilhoit and made our own committments to each other. We practiced before the minister before the actual ceremoney and Ted always said that that was when we were really married. I remember how pleased my parents were. This was in 1935. We honeymooned at the Mark Hopkins in San Francisco. My family were going to Hawaiian Islands and we could see them off on the boat.

I really loved the ranch, there were times together, he was a bachelor and he was used to doing things differently he was 32 and I was 28. I had my ideas too especially when the children came along. When the chips were down, he was always there, I was always there. It was a fine marriage, 43 years together.

I was in charge of the 40th anniversary and it was great fun. It was the same year of the first meeting of World Day of Prayer, to be held at the Mission Santa Ines. That day, March 7th, it was so cold, winds, rains, we could not keep the missions doors closed. I remember thinging will they ever hear me. After this we had refreshments at a local restaurant in Solvang, when I was told someone wanted me on the phone. I found Gail's mother there with her car, saying, I've come to babysit. My family had arranged for us to be in San Francisco for the anniversary and to be at the Mark Hopkins where all my family, children sisters, brothers were, we had a perfectly marvelous time.

This is a cattle ranch, we have always had polled herefords and my husband used to be so partucular about the color of the cattle, so much white and no more. And this beautiful red. Now the cattle are all colors, like a Persian rug. All the cattle were put in areas, those that looked alike. He felt that was a neater looking way for the cattle boyers. Not now. And the sizes were put together. In the early years we were always in debt, never could get out of debt. Finally when oil was discovered on the Luton corner near where we are, on the central part that Davis had bought, we had a little corner too. We did have some wells put down, none of them are working now. However there was enough that came out to get us out ot debt and to own our cattle almost clean. And to sent the children off to college.

I went twice east to Cornell, when I came home that time I flew. You flew in the day time, and were on the train at night, this was in 1930. I was not able to get my Masters right away. My professor had been asked to go down to West Virginia to do some work there, camping with the W. Virginia students, botany professor there. I was invited to go too. It was 12 weeks of study, one week in a different spot of W. Virginia.

When Mike died my husband said we did nothing about Ann's

going, why don't we start a little fund this time, so we started the Children's Health Memorial here in the Valley.

PL: Thank you, Mrs. Chamberlin for this interesting story of your life and the Los Potrero Ranch